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SUBJECT: NEW INEC COMMISSIONERS

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**¶11. (U)** Summary: President Obasanjo submitted names of ten new national Commissioners for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), along with the names of two currently serving Commissioners and the national Chairman, to the Senate for confirmation. After a walkout by opposition senators, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP)-dominated Senate approved them and nine were sworn in August 26. End Summary

**¶12. (U)** On 12 August, President Obasanjo submitted names of ten new national Commissioners for INEC to the Senate for confirmation. Obasanjo recommended the retention of two other Commissioners and the Chairman, whose terms have not yet expired. Besides the Chairman, there are two Commissioners for each of the six geo-political zones, each serving five-year terms. During the debate over the selections, senators belonging to the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP - the main opposition party) staged a walkout in protest after Senate President Wabara (PDP) refused to allow any delays in voting to accommodate debate, provide additional documentation on the nominees, and provide an opportunity to question the nominees individually. The PDP then used its Senate majority to approve all of the Commissioners.

**¶13. (SBU)** Of the ten new Commissioners, four had previously served as state-level Commissioners. Representing the North-East will be Esther Salleh of Taraba State and Alhaji Mohammed Abubakar of Bauchi State. Abubakar had previously been the State Commissioner for Rivers State (in the South-South), possibly the state with the most allegations of malpractice during the April elections. Representing the North-West will be Alhaji Bello Bala of Kebbi State and Dr. Shehu Lawal of Kaduna State. Lawal had previously been the State Commissioner for Edo State (in the South-East). The Edo State capital, Benin City, saw the more violence than most places in the run-up to the elections, and the few observers who could gain access to the city had major misgivings about the elections thereafter. Representing the North-Central will be Setley Daze of Plateau State and Engineer Anuka Uchola of Kogi State.

**¶14. (U)** Mrs. Olukemi Odebiyi of Ogun State and Chief Nimbe Farukanmi of Ondo State will represent the South-West. Odebiyi was formerly the State Commissioner for Lagos State. Professor Maurice M. Iwu from Imo will join Engineer F. Nwankwo of Ebonyi State in the South-East. Ekpeyong Nsa of Cross River State, who had previously been the State Commissioner for Yobe State (in the North-East), will join Dr. Ishmael Igbanji of Rivers State in the South-South.

**¶15. (U)** The two Commissioners retained, Nwankwo and Igbanji, both stepped into their positions during Obasanjo's first civilian administration when their predecessors vacated office (one died and the other retired). Nwankwo has one year remaining in his term and Igbanji almost the full five years. INEC Chairman Abel Guobadia also has four years remaining in his term, having assumed office last year when the former Chairman retired.

**¶16. (U)** On August 26, the ANPP formally filed a motion at the Federal High Court in Abuja to restrain Obasanjo from swearing in the new commissioners. Obasanjo swore nine of ten (Salleh was not present) in anyway on August 26, and the court adjourned hearings on the matter until September 2.

**¶17. (SBU)** COMMENT: INEC Chairman and Commissioner appointments are crucial issues in the conduct of elections in Nigeria at both the national and local level. Stakeholders outside the ruling party have constantly demanded an inclusive Commission. Obasanjo's nominations - and the process by which they were confirmed - were not inclusive, and bode ill

for election reform in general.  
ROBERTS